

CALIFORNIA REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
COLORADO RIVER BASIN REGION

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Public Notice No. 7-07-54
November 15, 2007

NOTICE OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A
TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
FOR
DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF
PROHIBITION OF WASTE DISCHARGES FROM
SEPTIC TANK-SUBSURFACE DISPOSAL SYSTEMS
TOWN OF YUCCA VALLEY, SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

The staff of the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Colorado River Basin Region (Regional Board) is inviting concerned, interested, and affected individuals as well as private and public entities to participate in a Technical Advisory Committee to help staff develop an amendment to the Water Quality Control Plan for the Colorado River Basin Region (Basin Plan). The Basin Plan amendment would incorporate a prohibition to address groundwater quality impacts that are being caused by discharges of waste from septic tank-subsurface disposal systems in the Town of Yucca Valley.

BACKGROUND

During the last eight years, the Town of Yucca Valley (hereafter "Yucca Valley") has experienced unprecedented growth. Yucca Valley relies on local groundwater for municipal/domestic purposes, but it lacks a municipal sewage collection and treatment system (SCTS). Essentially, wastewater treatment and disposal in Yucca Valley is accomplished via septic tank-leachfield systems, which pose an on-going, significant threat to groundwater quality, and which has already contributed to nitrate contamination of groundwater in the area. Yucca Valley and the Hi-Desert Water District, which provides drinking water for Yucca Valley, have made building such a municipal SCTS a priority. They expect to complete construction of the system within a couple of years.

The Regional Board does not have a waiver of waste discharge requirements for discharges of wastes from septic systems in the Colorado River Basin Region. To date, however, the Regional Board has been able to adopt waste discharge requirements for only a handful of discharges of wastes from wastewater treatment package plants that service commercial and residential developments in Yucca Valley. This only addresses the water quality impacts from these commercial and residential developments. A dedicated municipal SCTS would be able to address the impacts from existing and proposed discharges of domestic and commercial wastes. Yucca Valley and the Hi-Desert Water District have made building such a municipal SCTS a priority to address the impacts and overall threat to water resources in Yucca Valley.

To further the legislative goal expressed in the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act (Cal. Wat. Code § 13000 et seq.)—to protect the quality of the waters of the state for the use and enjoyment by the people of the state—Regional Board staff is proposing to develop a Basin Plan amendment that would establish a discharge prohibition for discharges of septic tank

wastes via subsurface disposal systems. The prohibition would require existing septic tank-subsurface disposal systems to connect to the municipal SCTS in accordance with a time schedule and the proposed construction schedule for the SCTS, which is planned to be built in phases. New septic tank-subsurface disposal systems would not be permitted if a sewer system were available to serve the lot.

Finally, in order to ensure that this septage/groundwater problem is addressed in a timely and appropriate manner, it is crucial that the public has the opportunity to actively participate in helping solve the problem. This opportunity will be provided through public outreach, education, and participation in the Basin Plan amendment process. One critical role that the public will play in solving this problem will be to help identify and obtain financial assistance to defray the costs associated with building, operating, and maintaining a municipal SCTS. The public will also be instrumental in ensuring that the SCTS is sited and built in a manner that minimizes environmental and socio-economic impacts.

DEVELOPMENT OF BASIN PLAN AMENDMENT

Basin Planning is a quasi-legislative process that, in the case of Yucca Valley, entails at a minimum the following:

1. Identification/extent of problem;
2. Identification of pollution sources;
3. Identification of needed pollution reduction/control actions;
4. Identification of alternatives available to reduce pollution and implement control actions;
5. Economic considerations;
6. Compliance with CEQA;
7. Identification of entities with responsibility to act and implement controls
8. Proposed Basin Plan amendment language to implement pollution reduction/controls and allocate responsibility to act;
9. Scientific peer review of proposed prohibition; and
10. Development of Implementation Plan and its monitoring and surveillance program.

For a more detailed explanation of these elements, please contact the Regional Board staff identified below.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Pursuant to the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act, the Regional Board has legal responsibility for ensuring public participation in this process to address the current groundwater contamination problem. As mentioned above, public participation is crucial for successful outreach, education, and development and implementation of the prohibition. Participation can be achieved through stakeholder groups and the general public. Stakeholder groups may be defined as those groups of people or organizations that have an interest in or are affected by the prohibition. These groups can originate from governmental, private, or public sectors within the vicinity. Stakeholders within this territory include the Town of Yucca Valley, the Hi-Desert Water District, the building industry, chambers of commerce, academia, environmental groups, and the public at large. The Regional Board will be providing periodic, up-to-date information about the proposed amendment to interested parties. At the same time, to facilitate two-way communication with stakeholders, the Regional Board welcomes any comments or relevant input from stakeholders and the public into the amendment process. Persons wishing to file

written comments on, or objections to, the limitations or extent of the prohibition, or any other aspects of this matter, are requested to do so at the earliest practicable date so that the comments may be considered in preparing the draft prohibition.

To encourage stakeholder participation, Regional Board staff is proposing to form a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) for development and implementation of the Basin Plan amendment. The TAC will play an important role in the amendment process and is expected to provide expert resources, scientific evaluations and conclusions, and recommendations regarding specific implementation activities. TAC participation will be limited to those entities wishing to be involved to this extent. TAC members are expected to assist Regional Board staff to develop the prohibition and its implementation in a relevant and timely manner. More specifically, members are expected to assist Regional Board staff at a minimum with the following:

1. Outreach and education of stakeholders in Yucca Valley;
2. Evaluation of water quality data;
3. Identification of priority sources of pollution;
4. Research activities regarding fate and transport of nitrates and other pollutants from septic systems;
5. Development/Identification of short-term and long-term control measures to phase out the impacts from septic systems;
6. CEQA documentation;
7. Identification of financial assistance to assist with implementation of controls;
8. Development of amendment language; and
9. Development of Implementation Plans.

Interested participants are requested to file with the Regional Board a letter of intent at the earliest practicable date, but no later than December 18, 2007. The letter of intent should outline, as appropriate, an area of expertise, available resources, and main concerns. All comments and correspondence related to this matter should be addressed to the Regional Board at the address shown above.

The following organizations/individuals have a place reserved in the TAC:

1. Town of Yucca Valley;
2. Hi-Desert Water District;
3. San Bernardino County;
4. Yucca Valley Chamber of Commerce; and
5. Mr. Ramon Mendoza, private citizen.

Please contact Mr. Cliff Raley at (760) 776-8962 for any questions regarding this matter. Please bring the foregoing to the attention of any persons known to you who would be interested in this matter.

JOSE L. ANGEL, P.E.
Assistant Executive Officer

JLA/jla

File: Town of Yucca Valley Basin Plan Amendment